From text to screen/From screen to text. Collaborative narratives in twenty-first century Italian fiction: the Wu Ming case

Patti, Emanuela

DOI:
10.3828/jrs.2016.160104

Document Version
Peer reviewed version

Citation for published version (Harvard):
Patti, E 2016, 'From text to screen/From screen to text. Collaborative narratives in twenty-first century Italian fiction: the Wu Ming case', *Journal of Romance Studies*, vol. 16, no. 1, pp. 39-61.
https://doi.org/10.3828/jrs.2016.160104

From page to screen/from screen to page

Collaborative narratives in twenty-first-century Italian fiction: The Wu Ming case

Emanuela Patti

University of Birmingham

Abstract

This article examines collaborative narratives in twenty-firstcentury Italian fiction, with a special focus on the work of Wu Ming, a collective of five Italian writers who have challenged traditional authorship at a double level: in terms of individual authorship and, by extending their collaborative narrative practices to their readership in digital environments, in terms of author–reader relationship. While their creative output is mainly printed books, they have developed various forms of digital storytelling such as multimedia features of their novels, blogging, fan fiction, and social networking. How the concept of 'collaborative narrative' has evolved from print to digital storytelling is the leading question of my analysis. More specifically, by re-assessing the concepts of 'authorship' and 'readership', this article aims to explore what forms of interactivity and collaboration Wu Ming have developed to empower their readers in the construction of the narrative.

Keywords: collaborative narratives, digital storytelling, interactivity, multi-authorship, participation

Introduction

Regardless of the medium and genre, collaboratively written narratives are narratives that involve the participation of multiple authors in the creation of a story. Scott Rettberg rightly pointed out that in literary history we can find various examples of co-authorship: 'a number

of works within the Western cultural and literary canon, for example, the epics of Homer, the Judeo-Christian Bible, and *Beowulf*, are believed to have been developed through collaborative storytelling and writing processes' (2014: 78). Collaboration in writing can also be intended in 'the less-considered sense of multiple people working together to produce an edited, designed, bound, printed, and distributed artifact' (Rettberg 2011: 187). However, literary culture has traditionally revolved around the idea of the author, for historical reasons of 'accountability, marketing, information management, combating piracy and the "genius model" that explains quality writing as the product of extraordinary minds', as explained by Rob Wittig in *Invisible Rendezvous* (quoted in Rettberg 2011: 187).

In twentieth-century Italian literature, collaborative narratives originated in artist or community circles, as in the case of avant-garde experimentation, radical educational projects and the underground cultures of the 1990s. Notable examples of multi-authored works include the novel *Lo zar non è morto* [The Zar Is Not Dead] (1929) by the futurist Gruppo dei Dieci, including withTommaso Marinetti and Massimo Bontempelli; the *Lettera a una professoressa* [Letter to a Teacher] (1967) by Don Milani and the students of the Barbiana school; the screenplay *Il gorilla quadrumàno* (1974), written by twenty-five authors of *Gruppo di Drammaturgia 2*, directed by Giuliano Scabia; and the novel *Q* (1999) by the collective Luther Blissett, a pseudonym first used in Bologna in 1994 by a number of cultural activists to stage a series of urban and media pranks, paradoxes, plagiarism, happenings and fakes that combined elements of Neoism, Mail Art and multi-identities to demonstrate the fallacies of the media system.[1]

The widespread use of web 2.0 technologies, also known as 'social media',[2] or indeed 'collaborative media',[3] has made 'collaboration' an everyday practice. Blogs, wikis and social networks have changed the paradigms ('participation', 'author', 'story') of collaborative narratives, extending 'communities of practice' (Wenger 1998: 7), blurring the

boundaries between authors and readers, thus giving rise to the figure of the 'wreader' (Landow 1992), and offering shared multimedia platforms for creating stories. Social media allow the creation and the exchange of user-generated content, making it a social activity that can be participated in by multiple users from different places on a potentially global scale. If we look at the trajectory from printed fiction to digital storytelling, the possibilities to co-write a story' have significantly multiplied beyond the co-writing of printed fiction, including constrained writing games, wiki writing, fan fiction, social writing, jam sessions, site-specific writing practices, and various forms of textual re-appropriation. Collaboration, interactivity and participation seem to have become synonyms in these practices that, regardless of the medium, conceive stories as an 'open work' (Eco 1962) to create together. However, the way readers can impact on the narratives they interact with varies significantly, depending on the 'infrastructures of participation' (Beer 2013: 10) and the formats of the media involved.

Considering these assumptions, in this article I will explore the concept of 'collaborative narratives' in twenty-first century Italian fiction.[4] I focus, in particular, on the work of a collective of Italian writers, Wu Ming, who have challenged traditional authorship at a double level: namely, in terms of individual authorship and, by extending their collaborative narrative practices to their readership in digital environments, in terms of author-reader relationship.[5] While their creative output is mainly printed books, they have developed various forms of digital storytelling such as multimedia para-textual materials of their novels, blogging, fan fiction, social networking through Pinterest, Twitter and YouTube.[6] These are 'situated in interactional contexts which enable readers and writers to communicate with one another online' (Page 2010: 209), as well as to produce collaboratively written narratives. How Wu Ming's concept of 'collaborative narratives' has evolved from their printed novels to their social media practices with their readers is the leading question of this study. More specifically, I aim to explore what forms of collaboration

Wu Ming have developed to empower their readers in the construction of the narrative. I address these questions by looking at how the 'hybrid narratives' of these groups of writers are developed across books and digital environments, literary co-authorship and web communities.

As discussed below, these are crucial questions in recent critical debates on interactivity and participation (Jenkins 2006; Löwgren and Reimer 2013; Page 2012; Ryan 2011, 2014), which are leading to a reassessment of the categories of 'activity', 'passivity' and 'ownership' that emerged in Roland Barthes' 'The death of the author' (1967) and Michel Foucault's 'What is an author?' (1969).[7] Early critics of hypertext theory welcomed the electronic text as the ultimate 'victory of the reader' after poststructuralism (Bolter 1990) Landow 1992); however, to what extent the freedom of 'navigating a text' is a form of interaction raises, understandably, some perplexity (Ryan 52011). Similarly, when it comes to collective writing, especially in printed fiction, much attention has been placed on the Foucauldian question 'What matters who is speaking?' as the ultimate attack to the author's authority and ownership (see Thoburn 2011 on Wu Ming, for example), but the perspective is different if we reconsider the same question in the digital context of social media. In digital storytelling, it does matter who is speaking, as this precisely marks the difference between different levels of interaction and participation. As Marie-Laure Ryan emphasizes in relation to interactive narratives (2014), the highest level of interactivity is when readers/users/players can change the narrative; the assumption, on the other hand, is that the text (the software, the game) pre-exists their participation. To what extent does the same concept apply to the collaborative practices through which Wu Ming engage with their readers in social media?

Wu Ming

Born as a subset of the Luther Blissett Project (1995–1999) in 2000, Wu Ming has pioneered transmedia 'literary culture' in Italy, making collaborative narrative practices the core of their

activities. The sixteen years of their career prove to be a constant reflection on the relationship between media, culture and society. In particular, they provide a very interesting case for exploring notions of multi-authorship and active readership, in that 'collectivism' and 'networking' are part of their DNA. While 'counter-culture' has been their mission since their early 'Luther Blissett days', their forms of expression have developed together with the technological and social environment of the last two to three decades (1994–2016). Their trajectory from an 'underground' group of activists to a '*social*-pop' group of writers in the mainstream editorial market could not reflect more significantly the evolution that radical avant-gardism has undergone in the shift from a mass media to a networked society where popular culture intersects with new media.

Their name, Wu Ming, in Chinese 'no name'[無] or 'five names' [伍名] depending on how you pronounce the first letter, stands for a group of five Italian writers.[8] After the novel *Q* (1999), written as Luther Blissett, their artistic production started with a series of historical novels written collaboratively by the entire Wu Ming collective, including *Asce di guerra* [Hatches of War] (2000) with Vitaliano Ravagli, *54* (2002), *Manituana* (2007), *Altai* (2009), *L'armata dei sonnambuli* [The Army of Sleepwalkers] (2014), as well as novellas such as *Previsioni del tempo* [Weather Forecasts] (2008), collections of short stories such as *Anatra all'arancia meccanica* [Clockwork Orange Duck] (2011), and a number of non-fiction books.[9] Since 2014, the group has left the historical novel genre, giving priority to 'hybrid narratives', in which they focus on marginalized voices in postcolonial literature, non-fiction written with literary techniques, investigative reports, travel literature, often written individually or with external co-authors, such as the novels *Timira* (2012) written collaboratively by Wu Ming 2 and Antar Mohamed; *Point Lenana* (2013) by Wu Ming 1 and Roberto Santachiara; *Cent'anni a Nordest* [One Hundred Years in North East] (2015) by Wu Ming 1, and *Il sentiero luminoso* [The Bright Path] (2016) by Wu Ming 2. They have also

produced a significant number of fantasy and children's novels that, with the exception of *Cantalamappa* (2015), have been single-authored by Wu Ming 4 (*L'eroe imperfetto* [The Imperfect Hero], 2010; *Difendere la terra di mezzo* [Defending the In-between Land], 2013; *Il piccolo regno* [The Little Kingdom], 2016).

Wu Ming are an excellent case study not only of collective fiction writing, but also for showing how the interactivity and participation of readers can develop at multiple levels and in various modalities. Their literary work has evolved together with social media, from the Bulletin Board System (BBS) to their newsletter, later developed into their blog *Giap!*, and then various websites of their novels and social networks such as Twitter, YouTube and Pinterest. What I will consider below is how their readers are involved in their storytelling, both at content and emotional level. Before I look at some examples of these participatory activities, I will take into consideration how these relate to the question of collective authorship.

The author question in Wu Ming: What matters who is speaking?

Following a particular Italian tradition of collective writing, Wu Ming rejects the traditional idea of individual 'authorship', shaping instead their writers' identity on the principles of collectivism and anonymity. Three main reasons underpin the choice of this name, as the writers claim: it is a refusal of the cult of the 'Author' as a celebrity, it is a tribute to dissidents (Wu Ming is a common name among Chinese citizens demanding democracy and freedom of speech), and it is a reference to the third sentence in the Tao Te Ching ('Wu Ming tian di zhi shi', 'Nameless is heaven's and earth's origin'). Wu Ming's collective identity and their refusal of the celebrity status of the 'author' needs to be contextualized in the historical and cultural period of the early 2000s and thus related to at least three crucial factors: their understanding of 'communal being' and 'general intellect' which they share with the Luther

Blissett Project;[10] their resistance to the 'cult of personality' in the context of the Italian media system of the Berlusconi era, and, in relation to that, their claim to be a counter-model of the celebrity-making system that was turning writers into stars.[11] Significantly, from their first experiences as part of the Luther Blissett Project (1994–1999) to their formation as a collective of writers (2000–), the history of Wu Ming runs parallel to the political career of Berlusconi who won the elections precisely in 1994. Thus, their choice of anonymity and collective writing was thought as a specific cultural strategy.[12]

Nicholas Thoburn (2011) has emphasized how their concept of 'authorship' represents an alternative to the cult of personality as being not the power of the privileged individual but of a 'desubjectifying politics of anonymity' (120). He draws upon Marx and Foucault to argue how both Luther Blissett and Wu Ming's collective identities are based on an understanding of 'ideas and practices as products of collective experience and struggle, not individual capacity, of genius or otherwise' (120); from this perspective, their model is the 'author-function' associated with the 'emergence of the author with texts that come to function, through the mechanisms of copyright law, as units of property' (121). Indeed, Wu Ming have adopted a 'copyleft' policy, making all their books free to download on their website. Also, anonymity, as in Foucault, allows a different 'surface of contact' with the reader who would not be distracted by the author's name (123). While such interpretation of authorship may explain Wu Ming's choice of collectivism and anonymity as writers of printed books in the specific context of Italian cultural history in the early years 2000s, it does not address their practices of collaboration with their readers in digital environments. Can these arguments on collective authorship also apply to their idea of collaboration with their readers?

Wu Ming's literary production has been accompanied by a constant engagement with their readership through multiple media platforms, as part of a project that goes well beyond

the literary production of their novels, aiming to spread their narratives on and off digital environments in order to have a stronger impact on culture and society. Undoubtedly, what is noticeable is how the ideological principles underpinning their concept of authorship, 'networking' and 'collectivism' have progressively shifted from fiction writing to the cultural enterprise called 'Wu Ming foundation', as their website clearly indicates. However, when it comes to engaging in collaborative narratives through blogs and social networking, the question of authorship needs to be reconsidered. In other words, the collaborative practices of storytelling facilitated by social media raise different questions . What matters is not how they reject their individual authorship in favour of a group-like anonymous author, but to what extent the readers are involved in the writing process of the stories. Moreover, if the question of ownership determined their choice of collectivism, when it comes to collaborative practices with their readers, who owns the story?

In recent years, the relation between author, owner, and person has been reconsidered with a special focus on its collaborative dimension. Various critics have challenged Roland Barthes' theory that the history of authorship is the history of the "Author-God" figure that 'grew up around the same time as the assertion of the legal rights of the author, individualism, and the bourgeois revolution' (Watkin 2015: 33–34), a theory that also resonates in Michel Foucault's 'What is an author?', where the French philosopher draws a connection between the modern author-function and the norms of property holding. According to this narrative:

> everything that follows in the twentieth century to contradict this authorial privilege is chalked up to a postmodern revolution that overturns the active Author-God with the passive processes of mass-reproduced photos of rocks stars and widespread digital

> pirating, bursting the dream of artistic originality and the myth of authorial property. (Watkin 2015: 34)

Disagreeing with this perspective, Jacques Rancière encourages us instead to rethink the history of authorship in relation to the 'Homeric question', namely to the "million little pieces" theory of Homeric authorship (2010: 100-105). As Watkin argues, the leading exponent of such theory, Friedrich August Wolf, identifies two separate moments of genius in the genesis of the Homeric documents: 'an initial Homer (or Homers) who created "different songs separately and without caring for the whole form",[13] and a second genius who sewed the independent stories together to form a coherent whole' (Watkin 2015: 34). In this respect, Rettberg emphasized that 'while the individual or group who aggregated, edited, and inscribed the Odyssey was instrumental in the fact that we are now able to translate, read and enjoy the epic today, Homer is best understood not as an author of the solitary genius model but as a function in a social system of collective authorship' (2011: 188). This suggests an idea of authorship as a mix of 'active creation, passive reception, and inspired rearrangement' (Watkin 2015: 34) that clearly challenges the 'death of the author' as a 'fundamental rupture in which complete authorial control (and a critical fascination with the figure of the author) gives way to the author as the impersonal site for the combination of pre-existing quotations (Watkin 2015: 35).

Such considerations on authorship are particularly relevant for understanding how Wu Ming's idea of 'authorial collectivism' beyond their novels and to draw a line of continuity between their understanding of literary authorship and their practices in web 2.0 digital environments. In social media culture, collaborative storytelling is an inherent feature of the ever-evolving platforms through which we operate. Computer-mediated-communication (CMC) is constantly and rapidly changing modes and discourses of narrative, each single

‘new medium’ introducing new formats of collaborative storytelling that can be mixed and remediated (Bolter and Grusin 2001) in multi-layered, multimodal and hyper-interactive narrative forms. This has resulted in a multiplication of ‘networked textualities’ and hybrid forms of authorship that have not yet been fully scrutinized. Before looking at how Wu Ming’s idea of multi-authorship has been reconsidered in some of their social media practices, thisneeds further critical assessment in relation to its counter-part: the reader.

The reader/user question: Interaction, interactivity, participation, immersion

The difference between ‘interaction’, ‘interactivity’, ‘participation’ and ‘immersion’ in narratives is a much discussed topic in debates about participatory cultures. In looking at the interconnection of these terms, the basic assumption is that while in times of traditional mass media such as the press, television and cinema, the production of media texts was in the hands of media producers who then distributed them to a large number of media consumers, new media technologies ‘disrupted traditional production-consumption media structures’ (Löwgren and Reimer 2013: 16), allowing media consumers to produce their own media texts in a many-to-many system of communication. The creative appropriation of media texts by audiences is, however, not a novelty of the digital age. ‘Interaction’ was already at the centre of theories that emphasized the active role of mass media audiences in creatively appropriating media texts, adapting them to their own unique social and cultural contexts (Eco 1962; Fiske 1989; Hall 1980; Levy 1997). Social media have expanded the audiences/users’ ability to appropriate and ‘re-mediate’ (Bolter and Grusin 2001) media texts, but they have especially created a shared social and cultural context that influences such creative practices in unprecedented ways.

More controversial is the difference between ‘interactivity’ and ‘participation’. Considered as ‘the Holy Grail of digital entertainment’ (Ryan 2014: 292), the concept of

‘interactivity’ became particularly popular with the first hypertexts. By borrowing the language of programming – ‘an application is called “interactive” when it allows for user input while it is running, whereas a batch program does not’ (Mechant and Van Looy 2014: 303) – ‘interactivity’ thus indicated the user’s ability to provide input to a digital text, and the digital text to respond according to this input, as in the case of early hypertexts in the 1990s. In narrative theory ‘interactivity’ is described as a ‘feed-back loop through which user input affects the behaviour of a text, especially regarding the information to be displayed’ (Herman et al. 2005: 250). As Ruth Page has remarked, in early studies on digital fiction ‘interactivity’ was ‘primarily conceptualized in terms of reader-text relations rather than interaction between human participants’ (2012: 4). As a typical feature of web 2.0 platforms, ‘participation’, instead, implies a collaborative or more social form of expression or reading, where readers can interact with both texts and other readers, including authors. It is indeed the core of artistic and cultural practices in social media that often result in collaborative projects. Finally, by ‘immersion’ we mean the capacity of a story to involve the reader into its virtual world, as if it were real (Rose 2011).

Today, by ‘interactive narratives’ we indicate those narratives where the ‘active user participation’ is not only afforded, but it is also encouraged by either the author or the media environment through which the narratives are spread. In her definition for the *Johns Hopkins Guide to Digital Media* (2014), Marie-Laure Ryan defines ‘interactive narrative’ as:

> ‘the combination of narrative, a type of meaning that captivates people in all cultures, with the active user participation afforded by digital media’, emphasizing that ‘the fascination for interactive narratives rests on the belief that our enjoyment of storytelling will rise to a higher power if instead of listening or watching passively we

> are able to interact with the story world, play the role of a character … and determine the development of the plot'. (Ryan 2014: 292–293)

Interactive narratives are thus narratives than allow a prominent reader/user's role in the story such as choosing their own paths of navigation through the text (for example, by clicking on links), contributing to the storytelling, and performing actions. Yet, there are different levels of interactivity and participation in narratives, as I discuss below, these being the result of the integration between 'the often unpredictable, bottom-up input of the user into a global script that presupposes a top-down design, since it must respect the basic conditions of narrativity' (Ryan 2014: 293). Interactivity and participation should not be taken for granted.

As Ryan emphasized over ten years ago, having the choice to navigate and explore a text, does not necessarily mean we are dealing with an interactive text: 'a genuinely interactive text involves not only choice, but also a two-sided effort that creates a feedback loop', whether the two sides are two humans, a human and the world, or a human and a programmable system that can simulate a mind or a dynamic environment' (Ryan 2005 web). As stated in the Introduction, Ryan identifies four types of interactivity conceived in terms of dichotomies: internal vs. external, and ontological vs. exploratory. Internal interactivity occurs when the user can exist as a character in the environment; external interactivity occurs when the user can experience the environment from an outside perspective. Ontological interactivity happens when the user can have an effect on the destiny or the history of the environment; it is exploratory when their role is limited to observation. Ryan has effectively argued that 'digital texts are like an onion made of different layers of skin, and that interactivity can affect different levels' (2011: 37):

> On the outer layers, interactivity concerns the presentation of the story, and the story pre-exists to the running of the software … on the middle layers, interactivity concerns the user's personal involvement in the story, but the plot of a story is still pre-determined; on the inner layers, the story is created dynamically through the interaction between the user and the system. (ibid.)

The possibilities that readers can impact on narratives have however multiplied and increasingly evolved together with technologies, making 'interactive narrative' a concept to rethink and expand constantly. Today this easily overlaps with that of 'collaborative narratives', which certainly needs further discussion. From early forms of interaction in hypertext fiction to wikis, the range of collaborative forms has significantly expanded. Yet, while participation is almost taken for granted in today's digital environments, each new medium allows different degrees of 'agency' (Murray 1997). As Rettberg has remarked:

> if we view networked literature not only as literary 'works' in the traditional book culture sense but also as literary systems functioning within other systems, then we need to reconsider the connection between authorship and agency. Collective narratives are collective to varying degrees, dependent upon the distribution of agency both to distributed authors and to aspects of the system itself. Collective literary and artistic production in new media ranges from works in which principal authors are equally conscious participants in all aspects of the work's production, to those in which the contributors are not at all conscious that their activity is resulting in artistic production. (2011: 197)

Rettberg proposes three typologies of participation in networked-based narratives: conscious participation, contributory participation and unwitting participation. In the first case, collaborators are fully aware of the constraints and form of a project and the role of their contribution to it; in the second case, contributors take conscious steps to make their text or media available to authors or to a system but do not know how it will fit into the overall project; and, in the third case, texts are appropriated by the text machine or harvested from the network. 'If contributory participation is the most common form of collaborative practice in network narratives, there are also many examples that make use of more appropriative methods' (Rettberg 2011: 198–199).

Rettberg takes into consideration examples of hypertexts, wikis, and collective narrative experiments, but, arguably, the notion of 'collaborative narratives' today includes many other forms of digital storytelling such as blogging and fan fiction, that are often re-adapted in printed books. As for literary digital fiction, we assume that what makes them 'collaborative' is that they are 'actively contributed to by several users in the form of textual additions and/or evaluation by different users' (Klaiber 2014: 124). Yet, while digital fiction is 'written for and read on a computer screen … [it] pursues its verbal, discursive and/or conceptual complexity through the digital medium, and would lose something of its aesthetic and semiotic function if it were removed from that medium' (Bell et al. 2014 1), in recent years collaborative narratives have often developed across page and screen on multiple media platforms. In other words, the interaction between users (co-authors or authors–readers) is based in digital media that simplify communication across physical boundaries, but the final outcome can be on paper. In fact, following Henry Jenkins' definition of transmedia storytelling, in narratology critics prefer to use the terms 'transmediality' (Ryan 2013) or intermediality (Grishakova and Ryan 2010) to indicate the migration of stories across media. In what follows, I will take into consideration some examples of Wu Ming's collaborative

practices between page and screen. I specifically selected a series of case studies that involve different levels of readers' 'interactivity' and 'participation' in the process of storytelling, in order to establish to what extent their contribution makes them part of Wu Ming's 'collective author-function'.

The readers' interaction and participation in Wu Ming transmedia practices

The website of the novel MANITUANA (2007)

In 2007 Wu Ming published their third collective historical novel, *Manituana*. Set in the years 1775–1783 in New York's Mohawk Valley, Quebec and London, the novel tells the story of Joseph Brant, leader of the Mohawks during the American revolution, his sister Molly, and the Six Nations alliance in British North America.

On the wave of Jenkins's *Convergence Culture: When Old and New Media Collide* (2006), for which Wu Ming wrote the preface to the Italian edition, the collective developed various transmedia features of the novel in a dedicated multilingual website.[14] This includes the following menu sections: a trailer, latest news (with a calendar of book launches, interviews, news, and reviews), side stories (not included in the final version of the novel), placemarks (with a map of places), visions (a section where 'a glam-rocker from Italy and a cartoonist from Serbia weave their languages together in a sonigraphic tribute to Manituana'), sounds (including music, namely audio contributions provided by musicians and composers inspired by the novel, and words, such as radio interviews, recordings from the book tour, readings from the novel, audio versions of side stories related to *Manituana*), chronology, level 2 (another level of the story where readers can interact with the text and contribute to the story), and Pontiac (the presentation of a concert-reading which develops as a spin-off of the main story).[15]

While some of these extra features, such as the trailer and the placemarks, are multimedia paratextual materials that allow an external, yet enhanced, audio-visual preview or exploration of the imagery of the novel, the sections 'sounds' and, especially, 'level 2', are thought as spaces where readers can interact at a more advanced level with the text of *Manituana*, whether through music or verbal narratives. In particular, 'level 2' is where the story can be expanded or manipulated through fan fiction. In order to access such level, readers have to answer a question about the novel; if the answer is correct, they can finally enter this private space of the website. Fan fiction certainly represents a high level of participation for the reader who can actively contribute to the story, expand it and change it, and not simply explore it. It is a form of reader–text and reader–reader interaction. Whether it could be considered an 'internal' and 'ontological' form of interaction, to follow Ryan's categories, is, however, another matter. In fact, the stories created by *Manituana* fans are neither integrated in the novel at any point, nor do they form a collaborative narrative that is then turned into another novel. Yet the illusion of participation in the narrative, given by the immersive experience of re-writing the main story and the rhyzomatic connection with other readers' stories, strengthens the emotional and intellectual bond with the novel and the community of fans, immersing the readers in the same narrative world. Whilst participating in the same world, however, the roles of authors and readers remain clearly distinct.

A similar effect is produced in *Pontiac, storia di una rivolta* [Pontiac, story of a rebellion],[16] a side story developed from *Manituana* by Wu Ming 2 that took the form of a live musical reading performance realized by Paul Pieretto, Stefano Pilia, Federico Oppi, Egle Sommacal, and later accompanied by the graphic illustrations of Giuseppe Camuncoli and Stefano Landini. In the novel, Pontiac is only briefly mentioned, but in the twelve texts of the live performance he becomes the protagonist of a crucial part of the story. It was Pontiac's fault, say Wu Ming, if King George III imposed a barrier to the free movement of

the colonists, the Proclamation Line of 1793, the treaty that ended the Seven Years' War providing Great Britain with enormous territorial gains. Through their live performances, Pontiac turns readers into audiences who can physically interact with this interartistic text, feeling, at the same time, part of a community – the community that gathers together at the live event (reader–reader interaction). It is the 'community-effect', in particular, combined with the aesthetic pleasure of the music/words combination that make readers feel 'internally' part of the story, not their active input into the narrative. As for the fan fiction, you are immersed in the same narrative world, you are called to enter the scene in different ways, but, ultimately, you do not change or contribute to the story, unless by 'contributing' we mean reinforcing it through your support, being physically and emotionally present. Similar dynamics also happen in digital storytelling, as I will illustrate below.

The blog GIAP! (2010–)[17]

Except where stated otherwise, the content of this website is licensed under a Creative Commons License. You are free to copy, distribute, display, and perform the work. You are also free to make derivative works, under the following commandments: thou shalt give the original author credit; thou shalt not use this work for commercial purposes; if thou alter, transform, or build upon a text, thou shalt distribute the resulting work only under a license identical to this one.

[Wu Ming, *Newsletter Archive Section*, wumingfoundation.com]

First developed as a newsletter with over twelve thousand members, after 2010 Wu Ming's blog *Giap!* has rapidly become one of the most visited and participated platforms in the Italian blogosphere. As stated in Wu Ming's website digest archive, back in 2000, their website was a 'very rough, primitive, website: no css, no javascript, no php, only the rawest

static html, with tags like <font>, <p>, <b> etc. Images were hastily stuck somewhere in the pages, and the choice of fonts was inconsistent: verdana, arial, Helvetica … Life was much less elegant, before cascading style-sheets' (WM, April 2006) (web). In 2010, in a post entitled 'Per una cartografia della nostra presenza in rete' [For a cartography of our digital presence], they announced a new blog and their digital presence on Twitter, Anobii (a social platform for book reviews), and YouTube. In an article published in the Italian newspaper *La Stampa* in April of the same year, they officialized the birth of the blog *Giap!* and their social network policy. The website underwent a face lift, playing, in particular, with hip language and a bold combination of pop or ironical images and serious discussions on political issues. Since then, their blog posts include a certain variety of topics such as reviews and promotions of books, critical views on current affairs, historical commemorations.

The shift from newsletter to blog has certainly made a difference in terms of interaction between readers and texts. Whilst progressively consolidating a community, the newsletter format did not allow a direct response on the readers' side. Through the so-called 'critical commentary' (Jenkins 2006),[18] the blog, however, offers readers a space where they can comment on the text, and at the same time interact with the bloggers and the other readers. A certain narrative linearity is allowed by the chronological order in which comments are published; yet, the interaction is fragmented. The response to the main blog post can be influenced by the comments that precede it and such dynamics depend on each person's response time and availability online. They also depend on the intermediary role of the blog manager who acts as 'gatekeeper' for the comments submitted for publication.[19] By offering an extra space for interaction with the text, the question is whether and how this offers the possibility to impact on the blog narrative.

In relation to this type of narrative, Ruth Page has pointed out that close reading and discourse analysis help us interpret such interactive practices only partially. In fact, in web

2.0 environments, digital storytelling cannot be separated from its social context of interaction, issues of identity re/creation and need for consensus (Page 2012). The social dimension of these practices of storytelling plays a crucial role in the narrative to the point that the interaction between readers can even be considered a parallel narrative, as the forking path strategy of *GIAP!* demonstrates. In other words, if commentaries are taking a more independent direction, then the thread forks in sub-threads. In this respect, Isabelle Klaiber has proposed a 'two plot levels model': 'the double role of the participants in contributing to, reading, commenting, and rating the primary text, they are truly "wreaders", whose interaction with each other constitutes a secondary plot' (Klaiber 2014: 136). The primary text, the blog post, becomes secondary when the interaction with other readers is more important, as often happens in blogging and other social media.

Overall, the principle is that the narrative progresses, if there is a supportive attitude. Disruptions such as 'trolling', for example, are a clear example of the opposite attitude. As Klaiber remarks, 'much of the commentary accompanying the collaborative process has a clearly community-sustaining function' (2014: 132). *GIAP!* demonstrates this point effectively. Readers can indeed have an impact on the narrative, especially when they engage extensively with their commentaries. In some cases, readers produce stories not only at commentary level, but they can become guest-authors of posts and crucial protagonists of the network. However, they generally contribute to a predetermined narrative design: the shared mindset of the community, their ideological values and their cultural background. Unlike other forms of multilinear collaborative narratives, blog narratives require coherence to make sense to their communities and create some accountability. It is therefore crucial to understand what principles and aims underpin that sense of coherence in blogs. Klaiber notes that:

> in multilinear projects, the tolerance among co-authors for deviations and inconsistencies is greater than in linear narratives where a single incoherency may ruin the entire primary plot and bring the secondary one to a halt … Multilinearity apparently reduces confrontation among the collaborators and disperses the secondary plot into as many branches as there are on the primary plot level, it seems likely that the secondary plot is more tightly knit in linear collaborations. (2014: 136)

Such considerations bring us back to the discussion on authorship. The wumingfoundation project, namely, a community revolving around the website and a wide network of online and offline contacts, places and events, can be considered as an extension of the principle of collective authorship they apply to their fiction writing. In a similar way, the principle of 'collectivism' underpins all these collaborative practices which have a fixed teleological focus. Readers are empowered, provided that they contribute to the same narrative design, as the example below will further demonstrate.

EBOOK Tifiamo Asteroide, Cento storie sulla fine catastrofica del governo Letta (2013) [Let Us Support Asteroid, One Hundred Stories on the Catastrophic End of the Letta Government][20]

In June 2013 Wu Ming sent via Twitter and their blog a call for short stories that were meant to contribute to an e-book entitled *Tifiamo asteroide*. All stories had to comply with the sci-fi genre and finish with the same lines:

> Dopo il boato assordante, con le orecchie che fischiavano, sentivamo ancora quella musica. Dove fino a un istante prima si trovava Enrico Letta, capo del governo di larghe

intese, si apriva una spaventosa voragine. Dall'enorme cratere si levavano nubi di fumo nero. (web)

[After a deafening roar, with our ears ringing, we could still listen to that music. There, where up to a moment before, Enrico Letta, leader of the prospective broad based coalition, was standing, was now an incredible chasm. From the huge crater, clouds of black smoke were rising.] (web)

This collaborative project was clearly meant to create some opposition to the Democratic Party leader Enrico Letta's prospective broad-based coalition. On 24 April 2013 Italian President Giorgio Napolitano had indeed asked the centre-left politician to form, under his guidance, a new government composed of a mixture of politicians and technocrats backed by the centre-left and centre-right People of the Freedom party (PDL) led by Silvio Berlusconi.

Coordinated by Maurizio Vanetti, some members of the community, the so-called 'giapsters' took care of the editing of the book which, within a couple of days after its publication, had reached 32,000 downloads and a significant media coverage.[21] Through the medium of dystopian storytelling, the e-book had the power to create a strong public opinion movement around this political event, again strengthening the sense of community around common ideological values. However, while the sci-fi genre allowed readers the creative freedom to develop their own imagery through the writing of their own stories, their role was again meant to reinforce, rather than to change, the narrative. In this respect, talking about collaborative narrative projects, Rettberg has aptly pointed out that 'putting voice and style aside, the success of the story depends on continuity and causality, and on implicit contracts between the various contributing writers to respect the ontology presented in the early chapters in producing the later chapters' (2005: 101). In this case, not only the constraints

imposed by the writing contest (the concluding lines of the story) strongly suggested the narrative of the story, in spite of its variation on the theme, but the community context clearly indicated the purpose of the book. As probably the most significant example of transmedia co-writing of the *giapster* community, *Tifiamo asteroide* demonstrates how social media strongly contribute to consolidating the bonds around a narrative, which leads to identity making of the community, especially when the final output is the book unit.[22]

Conclusion: The 'interactive paradox' of collaborative narratives

This article has explored how Wu Ming's 'collaborative narratives' have developed from their printed novels to their social media practices involving their readers. By re-framing the question of multiple authorship within the Homeric tradition, rather than reducing it to a Barthesian or Foucaldian perspective, what emerges is a common thread between the principles of collectivism underpinning Wu Ming's multiple authorship in their literary fiction and the variety of social media activities which go under the label 'Wumingfoundation.com'. As the website of *Manituana*, the blog *Giap!* and projects such as the ebook *Tifiamo asteroide* have shown, social media have the power to strengthen collective identities around stories. By feeling part of Wu Ming's narrative world, it is thus the community revolving around the Wu Ming foundation who owns the story, for which Wu Ming acts as a function in a social system of collective authorship. On the other hand, the spirit of community and the architectures of social media tend to reproduce linear, centralized, and homogenous narratives, due to the nature of their infrastructures and the social dynamics involved. The analysis of the case studies has demonstrated that, when it comes to the actual 'story-telling', readers' interaction and participation usually comply with a pre-determined narrative design, their creative and critical input being rather limited or not equally comparable to that of the collective of writers.

In a recent blog post entitled ‘Who killed the hyperlink’, the Iranian-Canadian author, freelance journalist and media analytic Hossein Derakhshan, released in 2014 from a six-year-long imprisonment in Tehran over his web activism, emphasized that ‘what made the web so incredibly diverse, open, non-linear, and decentralized’ was the hyperlink, ‘the biggest achievement of human civilization since the emergence of alphabets, writing, and the printing press’ (2016). Derakhshan clearly did not refer here to the limited space of hypertext or digital fiction, but to the possibility of creating your own story by freely navigating the potentially infinite discursive dimension of the World Wide Web through hyperlinks. According to Derakhshan,what social media increasingly do is instead to reinforce our views and opinions on the basis of popularity and newness, therefore neutralizing the space of diversity and freedom the web aimed for:

> this linear, passive, centralized, and homogenous stream of still or moving images is nothing but television. A personalized television, with many of its features. It has a prime time, when more people are tuned in and can see the stream. It treats the most serious topics in a shallow, rushed, and emotional way. It is obsessed with soundbites and infographics. It is closed and self-referential. (2016)

I have concluded this article with this reference because it raises an inherent contradiction between the utopian claim of absolute freedom and participation in the Internet and the fact that many forms of collaborative narratives in social media need to comply with a predetermined narrative design. When it comes to establishing to what extent Wu Ming readers have acquired the status of ‘authors’ , such a reflection cannot but lead us to the ‘interactive paradox’ discussed by Sandy Louchart and Ruth Aylett: ‘on one hand the author seeks control over the direction of a narrative in order to give it a satisfactory structure. On

the other hand, a participating user demands the autonomy to act and react without explicit authorial constraint' (2003: 25). The promise of 'participation' announced by social media, although enticing, is often elusive. If by 'participation' we mean being part of a predetermined narrative design, then social media not only allow such freedom, but they also reinforce it. However, somehow reinstating the paradox mentioned above, the case studies considered prove that readers have not fully acquired the status of co-authors, if by 'authors' we mean those who have the power and freedom to change the main narrative. Ultimately, does it not really matter who is speaking?

Works cited

Babette Factory (2005) *2005 dopo Cristo* (Turin: Einaudi)

Barthes, Roland (1981) 'The death of the author', in *Theories of Authorship: A Reader*, ed. John Caughie (London: Routledge), 208–213.

Beer, David (2013) *Popular Culture and New Media* (London: Palgrave Macmillan).

Bell, Alice, Astrid Ensslin and Hans Kristian Rustad (eds) (2014) *Analysing Digital Fiction* (Routledge: London).

Benedetti, Carla (2005) *The Empty Cage. Inquiry into the Mysterious Disappearance of the Author* (New York: Cornell University Press)

Bolter, David Jay (1990) *Writing Space: The Computer, Hypertext, and the History of Writing* (Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates)

Bolter, David and Richard Grusin (2001) *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press).

Boscolo, Claudia (2011) 'Lettura e narrazione in rete: Esempio di un commentario critico', *Ibridamenti*, 10 November.

Derakhshan, Hossein (2016) ‘Who killed the hyperlink?’ civichall.org/civicist/who-killed-the-hyperlink (accessed 4 July 2016).

Don Lorenzo Milani at al. (Scuola di Barbiana) (1967) Lettera a una professoressa (Florence: Libreria Editrice Fiorentina)

Eco, Umberto (1962), *Opera aperta* (Milan: Bompiani).

Fiske, John (1989) *Reading the Popular* (London: Unwin Hyman).

Foucault, Michel (1981) ‘What is an author?’, in *Theories of Authorship: A Reader*, ed. John Caughie (London: Routledge), 282–291.

Grishakova, Marina and Marie-Laure Ryan (eds) (2010) *Intermediality and Storytelling* (Berlin: De Gruyter).

Gruppo dei dieci (1929) *Lo zar non è morto* (Rome: Edizioni dei dieci).

Gruppo di drammaturgia 2 (1974) *Il gorilla quadrumàno* (Milan: Feltrinelli)

Hall, Stuart (1980) *Culture, Media, Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

Herman, David, Manfred Jahn and Marie-Laure Ryan (eds) (2005) *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory* (London: Routledge).

Jenkins, Henry (2006) *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press).

Kai Zen (2007) *La strategia dell’ariete* (Milan: Mondadori)

Kai Zen, *Romanzo Totale* (2008) http://www.kaizenlab.it/rt2008/?page_id=10

Klaiber, Isabell (2014) ‘Wreading together: The double plot of collaborative digital fiction’, in *Analysing Digital Fiction*, ed. Alice Bell, Astrid Ensslin and Hans Kristian Rustad (New York: Routledge), 124–140.

Landow, George (1992) *Hypertext: The Convergence of Contemporary Critical Theory and Technology* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press).

Levy, Pierre (1997) *Cyberculture*, trans. R. Bonnano (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press).

Löwgren, Jonas and Bo Reimer (2013) *Collaborative Media: Production, Consumption, and Design Interventions* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press).

Luther Blissett (1999) *Q* (Milan: Feltrinelli)

Mama Sabot (2008) *Perdas de fogu* (Rome: E/O)

Mama Sabot (2009) *L'albero dei microchip* (Rome: E/O)

Mama Sabot (2010) *Donne a perdere* (Rome: E/O)

Mama Sabot (2014) *Padre nostro* (Rome: E/O)

Murray, Janet (1997) *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace* (New York: Free Press).

Mechant, Peter and Jan Van Looy (2014) 'Interactivity', in *The John Hopkins Guide to Digital Media*, edited by Marie-Laure Ryan, Lori Emerson and Benjamin J. Robertson (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press), pp. 202-204

Paolo Agaraff (2003) *Le rane di Ko Samui* (Milan: Pequod)

Paolo Agaraff (2006) *Il sangue non è acqua* (Milan: Pequod)

Paolo Agaraff (2009) I ciccioni esplosivi (Tolentino: Edizioni Montag)

Paolo Agaraff (2010) *Il quinto cilindro* (Tolentino: Edizioni Montag)

Page, Ruth (2010) 'Interactivity and interaction: Text and talk in online communities', in *Intermediality and Storytelling*, ed. Marina Grishakova and Marie-Laure Ryan (Berlin: De Gruyter), 208–231.

Page, Ruth (2012) *Stories and Social Media: Identities and Interaction* (New York: Routledge).

Pelagio D'Afro (2013) L'acqua tace (Milan: Pequod)

Pelagio D'Afro (2014) Putteniere Blues (Milan: Lite Editions)

Pelagio D'Afro (2015) Pillole di cattiveria (Milan: Pequod)

Piga, Emanuela (2014) 'Comunità, intelligenza connettiva e letteratura: dall'open source all'opera aperta in Wu Ming', in *Transmedia: Storia, memoria e narrazioni attraverso i media*, ed. Clodagh Brook and Emanuela Patti (Milan: Mimesis), 55–77.

Rancière, Jacques (2010) 'The death of the author or the life of the artist?' in *Chronicles of Consensual Times* (London: Continuum), 101–105.

Rettberg, Scott (2005), 'All Together Now: Collective Knowledge, Collective Narratives, and Architectures of Participation, in Digital Experience: Design, Aesthetics, Practice, Proceedings of the 2005 DAC Conference. IT University of Copenhagen, 99-109, online http://retts.net/documents/cnarrativeDAC.pdf

Rettberg, Scott (2011) 'All together now: Hypertexts, collective narratives, and online collective knowledge communities', in *New Narratives: Stories and Storytelling in the Digital Age*, ed. Ruth Page and Bronwen Thomas (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press), 187–204.

Rettberg, Scott (2014) 'Collaborative narratives', in *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Digital Media*, ed. Marie-Laure Ryan, Lori Emerson and Benjamin J. Robertson (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press), 78–79.

Rose, Frank (2012) *The Art of Immersion* (New York: Norton & Co)

Ryan, Marie-Laure .

Ryan, Marie-Laure (2005) 'Peeling the Onion: Layers of Interactivity in Digital Narrative Texts', online http://black2.fri.uni-lj.si/humbug/files/doktorat-vaupotic/zotero/storage/CDQXGTTM/onion.html

Ryan, Marie-Laure (2011) 'The Interactive Onion: Layers of User Participation in Digital Narrative Texts', in New Narratives. Stories and Storytelling in the Digital Age, ed. Ruth Page and Bronwen Thomas (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press), 35-62

Ryan, Marie-Laure (2013) ‘Transmedial Storytelling and Transfictionality, *Poetics Today*, 34(3), 361-388

Ryan, Marie-Laure (2014) ‘Interactive Narrative’, in *The John Hopkins Guide to Digital Media*, edited by Marie-Laure Ryan, Lori Emerson and Benjamin J. Robertson (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press), pp. 292-297

Thoburn Nicholas (2011) ‘To Conquer the Anonymous: Authorship and Myth in the Wu Ming Foundation’, *Cultural Critique* 78: 119-150

Scrittura Industriale Collettiva (2013) *In territorio nemico* (Rome: Minimum Fax)

Walker Rettberg, Jill (2013 *Blogging* (Cambridge: Polity).

Watkin, Christopher (2015) ‘Rewriting the death of the author: Rancièrian reflections’, *Philosophy and Literature* 39: 32–46.

Wenger, Etienne (1998) *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning and Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

Wu Ming (2000) *Asce di Guerra* (Turin: Einaudi)

Wu Ming (2002) *54* (Turin: Einaudi)

Wu Ming (2007) *Manituana* (Turin: Einaudi)

Wu Ming (2008) *Previsioni del tempo* (Turin: Einaudi)

Wu Ming (2009) *Altai* (Turin: Einaudi)

Wu Ming (2011) *Anatra all’arancia meccanica* (Turin: Einaudi)

Wu Ming (2014) *L’armata dei sonnambuli* (Turin: Einaudi)

Wu Ming (2015) *Cantalamappa* (Milan: Mondadori Electa)

Wu Ming 1 (2015) *Cent’anni a Nordest* (Milan: Rizzoli)

Wu Ming 1 and Roberto Santachiara (2013) *Point Lenana* (Turin: Einaudi)

Wu Ming 2 (2015) *Il sentiero luminoso* (Portogruaro: Ediciclo)

Wu Ming 2 and Antar Mohamed (2012) *Timira* (Turin: Einaudi)

Wu Ming 4 (2010) *L'eroe imperfetto* (Milan: Bompiani)

Wu Ming 4 (2013) *Difendere la terra di mezzo* (Milan: Bompiani)

Wu Ming 4 (2013) *Il piccolo regno* (Milan: Bompiani)

Notes

[1] *Neoism* was an international subculture network of artistic performance and media experimentalism initiated by Istvan Kantor aka Monty Cantsin in Canada in the late 1970s. They took inspiration from experimentalist movements such as Futurism, Dada, Surrealism, Fluxus. Their art often used pseudonyms, pranks, paradoxes, plagiarism and fakes. Developed at least a decade earlier out of the Fluxus movement, *Mail art* consists instead of using the postal service as the main medium of their artistic expression. It was institutionalized by Ray Johnson's New York Correspondance School in the early 1960s. Both movements rely on the principle of networking, thus the interconnectedness of participants and, especially in the case of Mail art, the grassroots practice.

[2] To explain the difference between 'web 2.0' and 'social media', Walker Rettberg shows how 'the term "Web 2.0" increased greatly in popularity (or at least in search volume) from 2005 until 2007 and then began to sink. There are very few searches for "social media" until the end of 2008, but searches for the term rise steadily after that. The term "social media" has only recently become as frequently searched for as "Web 2.0" was in its heyday, but that may simply be because it's a more self-explanatory term than "Web 2.0", so that less people need to search for a definition' (2013: 63).

[3] By acknowledging this as the salient trait of contemporary media, Jonas Löwgren and Bo Reimer argue that, in comparison with 'digital media' or 'new media', the definition of 'collaborative media' best describes the media properties of web 2.0 technologies. As they claim, 'Collaboration is the one feature that in the clearest way indicates the particular kind of

communication that is typical within this context. Rather than focusing on technology, collaborative media focuses on the action-oriented component of media; it focuses on the kinds of practices the cultural form makes possible … *Collaborative media is a particular cultural form for collaborative, mediated practice*' (2013: 15, emphasis in the original).

[4] I here use a comparative approach that acknowledges the need to reassess the critical-literary categories of 'fiction' (including new web genres), 'interactivity' (not only as reader–text interaction, but also reader–reader interaction), and 'narratology' (as the study of narratives situated in social contexts); at the same time, my approach looks back at the traditional literary categories of 'author' and 'reader'.

[5] Wu Ming's experimentation across traditional literature and new media has certainly inspired groups of writers such as Kai Zen, authors of the novel *La strategia dell'ariete* (2007) and the hypertext *Romanzo Totale* (2008), and Scrittura Industriale Collettiva (SIC), authors of the largest project of collaborative writing ever produced, the novel *In territorio nemico* (2013) written by 115 authors. Yet, multi-authored fiction in Italy can be found also outside digital environments. Interesting examples including Babette Factory (with Christian Raimo, Francesco Pacifico, Francesco Longo and Nicola Lagioia), authors of *2005 dopo Cristo* (2005); Paolo Agaraff, later named Pelagio D'Afro and then developed in *Carboneria Letteraria* (including Gabriele Falcioni, Roberto Fogliardi and Alessandro Papini), who have experimented across role-playing games and fantastic literature, authors of novels such as *Le rane di Ko Samui* (2003), *Il sangue non è acqua* (2006), *I ciccioni esplosivi* (2009), *Il quinto cilindro* (2010), *L'acqua tace* (2013), *Puttaniere Blues* (2014), *Pillole di cattiveria* (2015); and Mama Sabot (with Massimo Carlotto, Francesco Abate and some emergent writers), authors of a number of investigative reports and novels such as *Perdas de Fogu* (2008), *L'albero del microchip* (2009), *Donne a perdere* (2010) and *Padre nostro* (2014). Collaborative writing has also been used in scholarly projects and critical activities, as

demonstrated by the groups Ippolita, Laser (Sapienza University), Equipe sperimentale (University of Moderna and Reggio Emilia), 404 (University of Siena).

[6] I here use the term 'digital fiction' including blogs, digital storytelling, and life narratives (Page 2012: 4).

[7] Some of these questions were raised already in Carla Benedetti, *The Empty Cage. Inquiry into the Mysterious Disappearance of the Author* (2005).

[8] These are Roberto Bui, Giovanni Cattabriga, Luca Di Meo, Federico Guglielmi, Riccardo Pedrini, although the group's composition changed over time with one departure (Luca Di Meo).

[9] Non-fiction works by Wu Ming include *This Revolution Has No Face* (2002); *Giap!* (2003); *Grand River: A Journey* (2008); *New Italian Epic* (2009); *Thomas Munster: Sermon to the Princes* (2010).

[10] The principles of 'communal being' and 'general intellect' in Wu Ming are well illustrated in Thoburn 2011.

[12] Wu Ming's early authorial and narrative strategy cannot be disjointed from the context of the Italian media system of the late 1990s, monopolized by Silvio Berlusconi, both Prime Minister and Mediaset owner, where the cult of personality was pervasively encouraged and promoted by television, magazines and film production. In connection to that, in the early 2000s, new generations of Italian writers, including Wu Ming, were deeply concerned about the 'fictionality' effect of historical events conveyed by broadcast media, the attack on the Twin Towers in 2001 is probably the most emblematic example, with the result of neutralizing the 'reality effect' of such events. As stated in their 'manifesto', the *Memorandum of the New Italian Epic* *http://www.wumingfoundation.com/italiano/WM1_saggio_sul_new_italian_epic.pdf]*, their

historical novels, in particular, read as an attempt to propose a counter-narrative of history and Italian current affairs, even when they relate stories of other people and other times, as in most of their novels.

[13] Watkin quotes Georges Jean Varsas "The Persistence of the Homeric Question" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Geneva, 2002), publication number L. 512, p. 52. http://archive-ouverte.unige.ch/unige:155

[14] www.manituana.com

[15] On the transmediality of *Manituana*, see also Piga (2014).

[16] By clicking on 'Pontiac' on the *Manituana* website, readers have four different options to download the musical reading performance, either as a free download, although they are then encouraged to give a gift to someone else, pay a given price, choose their own price, or download it again and pay, if downloaded for free the first time.

[17] See http://www.wumingfoundation.com/giap/

[18] On the critical commentary in social media see Boscolo (2011).

[19]

[20] The ebook can be downloaded at the following link http://www.wumingfoundation.com/italiano/TifiamoAsteroide2.0.pdf

[21] See www.maurovanetti.info/?q=node/873.

[22] The same principle can be applied to the *Storify* function of Twitter, often used by Wu Ming.